

As Good As It Gets

U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS CENTER

Execution of rollover drills and situational awareness turned a potentially deadly rollover event into a successful survival story for three Soldiers when their Bradley Fighting Vehicle rolled into a canal in Iraq.

SSG Logan Wallace, Bradley commander; SPC Mark Hoiland, gunner; and SPC Ray Ness, driver, were able to successfully exit their BFV after the road on the bridge they were crossing gave way, causing the vehicle to slide and overturn before coming to rest upside down in the canal.

"We were in a vehicle convoy on a night mission," said Wallace. "We saw the crossing and proceeded to make the turn over a canal."

With knowledge of tactics, techniques and procedures specifically developed for the operational terrain and background experience through training and rollover drills, Wallace and his crew made the proper preparations before crossing the bridge.

"When the road started to break away, causing us to slide into the canal, I yelled over the intercom system that we were sliding," said Ness. "SPC Hoiland then yelled 'rollover.'"

"We slid in and tipped upside down," said Hoiland.

"The BFV hit the bottom and water filled the turret."

While water was filling the vehicle, the three Soldiers immediately began trying to exit the vehicle and made certain not to leave a fallen comrade behind.

"I was able to turn myself around upwards after the water filled the turret," said Hoiland. "I then yelled for SSG Wallace and started pulling on him because he was still upside down."

"I was able to get down in the turret of the Bradley before we were upside down but was forced into the BC's hatch," said Wallace. "I was face first in the mud and water. I tried to get free and upright but was stuck in the mud and my IBA (Interceptor Body Armor) was catching on something. Water filled the turret very fast and I didn't know the fate of my crew members. I continued to struggle to free myself from the river bed, holding my breath and thinking time was running out. I started taking a little water into my lungs and then I heard SPC Hoiland screaming my name and pulling on my IBA until he was able to get me upright."

While Hoiland was freeing Wallace and getting his head above the water, Ness was also taking action.

"I was stuck up in the driver area," said Ness. "I finally freed myself and made my way through to the back troop area of the BFV. Once I got back in the troop compartment and saw that the gunner's (turret shield) door was not open, I heard SPC Hoiland yelling that he couldn't get the turret door open because he was pinned against it. I then felt for the handle to the gunner's door and pulled it open."

The driver and gunner of the BFV that had been following the Soldiers' vehicle dove into the water to assist them out of the water.

"The Soldiers knew the TTPs and procedures that helped save their lives," said MAJ Michael Murray, the battalion safety officer. "By placing the turret in the 12 o'clock position, part of the training and preparation to cross canals, it allows the Soldiers to get the door open. Otherwise it could be blocked. Additionally, the crew conducted their rollover drill as the vehicle entered the water. That is training saving lives." Training and proper execution of TTPs also had the three Soldiers securing all their equipment as part of pre-combat checks.

"This prevented the vehicle from being cluttered and having items that could have hit the crew members as the vehicle overturned," said Murray. "The 'hell hole' was clear, which allowed Ness to get out as well as get back to open the door." According to Army statistics, rollovers have been decreasing. This reduction is directly attributed to improved TTPs such as reduced speeds, increased rollover drills and leaders ensuring Soldiers are aware of hazards. Comparing fiscal 2006 to fiscal 2005, the Army had an 82-percent reduction in drowning fatalities resulting from rollovers. "These Soldiers did everything right," said Murray.